

Sweet Like Cotton Candy by peypsi

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Summary: At the yearly Derry Fair, Eddie contemplates coming out to his best friend, and long time crush, Richie.

1. Chapter One: Cotton Candy Confessions

Every year around the end of spring, a small fair would pass through Derry. It would only be open for a weekend, and the rides were old and the games mostly out of date, though the Losers Club never opted out of a chance to have some fun.

The sun was high that May afternoon that the six boys and one redheaded girl rolled through to the field that briefly housed the fairgrounds. Many things had been in that plot over the years; circus', new year's celebrations, though it was mostly used by drunk teens as a place to play out their hooligan actions.

But, it never looked better than this. Vibrant colours and nothing but the sound of happy families filled the warm May air, all as if the horrors of Derry, Maine had never really existed.

"Where should we start?" An oddly eager Bill chimed from the side, turning bright eyes across to his friends who were all seemingly looking in different directions.

"Bumper cars!"

"Shooting!"

"Haunted house!"

A slew of different options was presented to them, though the group eventually settled on the first thing shouted; bumper cars. Thus, the seven teens made their way through the crowd to somewhere in the centre of the fair. It was a lot more crowded there. Lining up for the cars among the mass of other kids and Derry residents, it wasn't long before a certain bespectacled boy grew impatient.

"How much longer is this going to take? I could get Eddie's mom on her knees faster than this crowd's moving!"

Of course, that gained a strained look from the shorter boy behind him, though Richard only smiled. "C'mon, Eds. You gotta agree. This is complete bullshit. I've seen paint dry faster than this."

Shaking his head, Eddie turned an almost pleading glance across to Ben, though he was only laughing along with Richie's words. "You know Rich, maybe it'd move FASTER if we weren't stuck behind that big head of yours." He paused, "And don't call me Eds."

Richie, only chuckling still, shook his head dismissively of the smaller teens words. "Righto Spaghetti'o." Richie teased still, gaining yet another look from the smaller teen beside him.

Eventually, after some thirty minutes of waiting, the group was let through the gate in pairs of two; at least, some of the group were. The two stragglers at the back, Richie and Eddie, were halted, gate closed before they could step through.

"What the shit, dude!?" Richie exclaimed, adjusting his glasses as he turned his gaze up to the tattooed employee, who only shrugged. "You'll go next kid."

Bill and Richie shared a glance then, though Richie only waved for the group to go ahead, groaning as he turned his attention back to Eddie beside him. "Do you wanna go get some cotton candy or something? It's not gonna be as fun just us."

Nodding along to the idea, both boys soon slipped out of the line, walking towards the nearest food stall.

Eddie walked alongside Richie, eyes downturned as he listened to the other mutter about the carny not letting them on. "It's bull shit!" He exclaimed, "We were obviously a group! I mean, you're small enough, you could'a shared with Bill and Stan."

Brow quirked a moment at those words, Eddie was soon breathing a laugh. "Hey! You're lanky enough! Why don't YOU share with them?" Of course, those words were met with a look of mock disgust from Richie.

"Share? Me? Never! 'Sides, s'ghetti, I wouldn't wanna share with anyone but my main man."

"Main man? You have one of those?" Richie rolled his eyes, "You, loser."

That sentiment left Eddie feeling oddly warm. Well, not oddly. Richie always made him feel warm in the little things he did. From tender glances to bright, beautiful smiles. Even the jokes, sometimes, prickled at Eddie's skin in the nicest of ways. Ways he wasn't sure he'd ever be able to forget.

It was those feelings that had brought him to the very jarring realisation. Eddie Kaspbrak liked boys. Now, that being said, he didn't not like girls. He had crushes on girls in his class. He had often wondered what it would be like to date one. But this was different. This was Richie.

Perhaps that's why his palms were sweating. Perhaps that was why his throat was tightening at the mere thought of the words. No. In no world would Eddie ever admit so easily that he may actually have feelings for the trashmouth, but maybe, just maybe, Richie could be the first to know. Maybe Richie was the safest place for him to come out.

Standing at the food stall, Richie ordered a stick of cotton candy for each of them, handing some coins up to the carny before handing one of the saturated pink clouds of sugar to Eddie. With nothing but a short, nervous thanks Eddie was soon pulling pieces of candy off the paper stick, stepping to the side of the stall where he and Richie stood for some moments.

"Hey Rich? Do—do you wanna go for a walk? I wanna talk to you about—well, something." Smooth. At least, Eddie thought so. Richie on the other hand, turned worried eyes his friend's way, chewing absently on the candy in his mouth before shortly nodding along to the others words. "Sure, Eds. I guess."

Silently, the two boys started walking through the crowd. Eddie didn't know how to start. Or where. Should he start at the beginning? Did the beginning of it all even INVOLVE Richie? Of course, it did. It was all him. From that first glance and short laughter, right up until this moment. Eddie coughed.

"I don't—I don't really know how to say this." Though the people around them didn't make it any easier. "Rich, you like girls, right?"

That question alone had caught Richie off guard, and the boy just about stopped in his tracks; eyes blown wide behind thick lenses. "Well, duh." He started, nervous laugh ringing through an equally nervous smile. "What kind of question even is that, Eds? 'Course I like girls."

Swallowing back thickly, pushing his fear down too, Eddie turned his eyes back to Richie. His gaze was bright and worrisome, though there wasn't much new there. "Well. What—what would you say if—if I didn't?" A pause, "If I didn't like them? Like that?" Eddie had to take a moment, glancing around them to be sure he hadn't been heard.

Richie, on the other hand, had his eyes glued to the blushing boy before him, holding his cotton candy loosely at his side. He had lost any semblance of an appetite. "If you didn't?" Richie repeated, his own face taking on a pinkened hue as he stared forward at the smaller teen, though, he soon fell in line with Eddie once more; heading through the crowd.

Eyes soon plastered to the grass once more, Eddie waited patiently for a verdict, idly picking at small pieces of his candy, though not really enjoying it as much as he had before this conversation had started.

"Well, if you didn't... I wouldn't care." The words left Richie's mouth easily, because they were true. As true as the sun in the sky. As true as the drying grass. As true as Eddie's smile. As true as the way he brushed through his hair in frustration. As true as the way he curled his lip when he was concentrating. As true as the dry laughter he gave when Richie's jokes weren't all that great. As true as the way Richie loved him for it. He loved his Eddie, though it was something he'd never be able to admit. Not even to himself.

With a short sigh of relief at Richie's words, Eddie nodded, only then being able to bring his eyes up to the other. "Okay. Great! I'm—I'm glad. Really. Relieved, more like it." He breathed a laugh, "I was worried you'd hate me or something."

"Hate you? Eddie, I'd never hate you. None of us would. And being—" he choked, "liking boys doesn't change that! You're one of us, you know."

"I know." Eddie stated quickly. "I know that, of course I do." In the back of his mind, he did, though the anxiety had dug and buried and embedded itself in his mind; leaving Eddie uneasy. "I just—I don't know. It's stupid."

He knew what he wanted to say. He knew he wanted to tell Richie WHY it was so important to him. Why he didn't want Richie, of all people, to hate him for being gay. But the words wouldn't form in his mouth. It was too soon. Not yet. Though, he couldn't help the nagging feeling clawing at his neck that maybe, he wouldn't even get his chance.

"It's not stupid, Eddie. It's not." Richie set a reassuring hand to his friend's shoulder, sending oddly kind and soft smile his way. Richie was never good at conveying genuine emotions. He always avoided it through bland and poorly timed humour. But for once, he put all jokes aside, knowing his friend, his best friend, needed consolation. "We all love you, dude. No matter what." It was all he could think to say.

"You have to promise you won't tell anyone." Eddie stated quickly, hand coming to Richie's wrist, thin fingers curling around the others arm before gently brushing the others hand away from his shoulder. "No jokes either, Richie. I'm serious."

"I know you are. I promise. No jokes. No outing." He gestured to zipping his lips, smiling only growing wider thereafter.

With a quick, definitive nod, Eddie turned his eyes to his cotton candy, tugging at a few pink wisps.

"Should we go back?" He finally asked, eyes turned down the way they had come. Richie's glance followed after Eddie's a moment, though he was soon shaking his head. "Nah, I don't want to just yet. Might be awkward."

"Awkward?" Eddie asked, "Why?"

"What do you mean why? Dude, you just came out to me. I need at least fifteen minutes to process this information. Eds. 'Else it's gonna be joke city over there." Richie breathed brittle laugh, though there

was no fault to his words. Eddie knew that all too well. "Alright." He thought a moment, "Let's keep walking then."

Quietly, the pair moved onward, walking idly through the sea of fair-goers. Eddie kept his eyes on his candy treat while, every so often, Richie brought his eyes to the boy beside him. His chest swelled in a kaleidoscope of butterflies. A full-blown swarm leaving him feeling tickled and breathless.

Over the years the pair had been friends, Richie had never felt truly close to Eddie until that afternoon. Of all the people Eddie could have told, he told him. He came out first to the annoying trashmouth rather than stoic-Stanley or

good-listener-Bill. He couldn't help the pride that flooded over him, leaving him walking a little taller and smiling a little wider.

Eddie didn't notice that though, too caught up in his own thoughts. Wondering why Richie was walking so close. Wondering if he could feel the electricity between their hands, daring Eddie to reach out and intertwine calloused fingers. Daring him to whisper words that had been on his mind longer than he'd care to remember. Daring him to lean up and kiss those lips that had run so many jokes into the ground.

He didn't.

And in that moment, he wasn't sure he ever would. Instead, he curled his fingers into a tight fist, breathing out the pent-up feelings in a heavy, long sigh. Maybe he was in love with his best friend. And maybe, he'd never get the chance to tell him.

But maybe, Eddie thought, he could be okay with that.

2. Chapter Two: The Kissing Cabin

There was a place not far from the Kissing Bridge. Not along the road, but down along the river. Some minutes' walk downstream was an old shack-type, grounded tree-house. It had been there, people said, as long as Derry itself. Many kids and teens would visit the sight, though only the older kids dared to enter; rumours of ghosts and murderous hobos clutching the minds of the children too young to know better, and simply those with weaker hearts.

In reality, it was a place most middle schoolers and high schoolers would go to drink, smoke, do drugs and, in some instances, fuck. If anything, the rumours were started by the older kids to keep the youngsters at bay.

It was the start of summer vacation, and Richie, Stanley and Bill had been wandering down the stream, the leader of their little band pointing to where he and Eddie had once built a small dam, only to have it broken by some teens that had come along.

"We KNOW about your little dam, Billy." Richie said with a hard roll of his eyes, "You only tell 's about it every time we come down here. It's just about the gayest thing you've ever done, you know?" The bespectacled teen smiled then, "Did you guys touch tips too?"

"Wh-what the h-heh-hell, Richie? We were l-luh-like ten."

"What's that matter? I heard Cindy Rodgers gave Dave Clemence a handy under the Kissing Bridge in sixth grade!"

"Jesus, Richie. Do you believe everything you hear?" Stan asked with a shake of his head, though it was soon followed by a short breath of laughter.

"Uhh, only the cool stuff. You wouldn't know about cool if it bit you on the ass though, Stan."

"Oh, yeah. 'Cause you're the epitome of cool, trashmouth."

"Damn fucking right, I am! Got your mom to spell it out for me on my

—"

"Sh-suh-shut up, Richie! You t-tuh-too, Stan!"

The two boys only laughed, Richie nudging Stan's elbow with his own as they continued down the way; kicking a few stones into the stream.

"So, Rich, where's Eddie today?" Stanley asked, breaking the few moments of silence that had settled in the summer air.

"Eds? Uhh, he had to go to a doctor's appointment with Mrs. K, and then I think they were runnin' some errands." Richie had since picked up a stick, using it to prod at some of the rocks in the water. Stan and Bill shared a knowing glance.

"You two have been spending a lot of time together lately, huh?" Stan continued, eyes briefly looking to the stick Richie had in his hand. What was he going to achieve?

"I wouldn't say a lot." Richie rolled his shoulders, "I only know about all that 'cause he called me last night."

"He c-cuh-called you?"

"Yeah. He calls me all the time."

Stan and Bill shared another look, this time, Richie caught it; anxiety swelling in his chest.

"What—? What was that look for?" Richie blinked, "Are you guys doin' some weird, virgin mind reading thing? Is that why I—"

"Shut up, Richie."

Richie frowned.

"We just th-thuh-think it's o-oh-odd."

"Odd?" Richie echoed the word, letting it twist and turn before settling in his mind; letting himself process its meaning. "How is it odd? We're friends."

"Best friends."

"Yeah?" Richie straightened up, "We all, aren't we?"

There was another shared glance and the small group of three was soon walking again.

"Rich, is there something—going on? With Eddie?"

"Something?" The boy readjusted his glasses, turning magnified eyes Stan's way. Of course, the question itself cause a slew of anxiety to build in his chest; mind running a mile a minute (not that it was anything new).

"Y-ye-yeah. He's been acting w-weh-weird." Bill said, "D-duh-different."

"Eddie? Actin' different?" Richie scoffed, "Nah. Nah, dude. Eddie's the same. He's always the same." He laughed, "I think he's allergic to change."

"Or allergic to the truth." Stanley commented with a short shrug, only to be elbowed by Bill to his left.

"The truth? What truth?" Richie blinked, "You two are talking all cryptid and shit today, what the fuck."

"Well, you two have just gotten—a lot closer recently." Stanley started, trying to keep his voice as light and easily as possible (which was a challenge for him to say the least). "We're just curious if you know, anything's going on."

"Anything's going on? Stan dude, what the fuck do you mean by that?" His words came out fast and more defensive than he had intended, dark brows furrowing as he toyed with a frayed thread on his old Hawaiian shirt.

"You know exactly what I mean, Richie." Stan smirked, "You guys are always together these days... You've got people talking."

"Talking? What the hell! I don't even—we're not like that! I mean, he might be, but I'm not!"

"M-muh-might be what?"

"You know! Gay!"

Richie regretted the words the moment he had spoken them, immediately slapping his hands over his mouth, eyes blown wide in shock.

"I didn't say that! You—you didn't hear it from me! God, don't tell Eddie, please!"

"Richie we a-auh-already n-nuh-know."

Richie let his hands slowly fall from his face, dropping to his sides as he stood in place, staring at his two friends in disbelief. "What? How? Did—did he tell you?"

"He didn't have to," Stan started, "I mean, he doesn't really try hard to, you know, hide it."

Lips pursed tightly, Richie turned his gaze to the dirt. He could feel the guilt manifesting, leaving his throat feeling gaunt and dry.

"Still... He trusted me, guys. That was a secret he trusted me with and—"

"Calm down, R-Ruh-Richie. We won't tell." Bill assured.

"Yeah. We'll tell him we figured it out on our own. Like I said, it's not like he's tried to hide it."

Richie didn't buy it, but he supposed there was nothing he could really do. Sometimes, he really hated his big mouth.

"Okay, if you say so." Richie sighed, "But, you guys know it doesn't change who Eddie is, right? He's- he's still the same person and shit."

"Course we know that, hogweed." Stanley defended, looking to Richie with a face that was bordering on offended. Really, Richie must've thought he was Eddie's only friend in all the world. "And like we said, we won't tell. He won't even suspect a thing."

Again, Richie nodded, though he couldn't rid himself of the numb sinking feeling in his chest. He felt as if he was being weighed down all the way to China from his guilt.

The three boys continued along the way, soon enough reaching the Kissing Cabin that they had been heading toward. Richie took to sitting cross legged on the floor, fingers idly twirling and toying with a few blades of grass that poked through the floorboards. Stanley and Bill sat across from Richie, their knees brushing slightly as they shared another glance. Neither knew how to start.

"S-suh-so..." Bill breathed, "you're o-oh-okay with Eddie being—being gay?" His words seemed to tremble and fall from his lips in an oddly ungraceful way. Bill wasn't the best of talkers to begin with, that was obvious, but something about the way of his words left Richie... Confused.

"Well duh," Richie breathed, "he's my best friend. Like I said, it doesn't change him." Richie couldn't explain what he was feeling in that moment. He kind of felt like a cornered animal, with Stan and Bill as the hunters. They wanted something from him, he could tell that much, but the teen couldn't figure out what.

He pushed up his glasses.

"What the hell is this all about?" Now, it was Richie's turn to have his voice quake. "I don't—I don't really appreciate the twenty questions you guys are givin' me. Haven't I made the point clear enough or somethin'—?"

Richie continued to ramble. Stand and Bill only stared ahead at him in near disbelief. They could tell they had struck a chord, but what one?

"Richie I'm gay." Stanley interjected, voice flat and plain, not fault to his words. That was enough to shut Richie up.

"W- what?"

"Well, not gay, I mean—I like girls. I'm bi. I think."

Stanley was never the unsure type, Richie knew that much. They had

only gotten close in the past few years; having been introduced through Bill. And, well, Richie was an acquired taste at best, not many people would put up with his jokes and endless, inappropriate banter. It took Stanley years to be able to deal. Which, was what left Richie so shocked about all of this. Stan the Man had just come out. To Richie. In the Kissing Cabin.

"O-oh... That- that's cool!" Richie tried to regain his composure, though it was harder than he had anticipated.

"Cool? That's what you're going with?"

"Yep! Best I got. Sorry, squid."

Stanley sighed, sending a pleading look Bill's way, though he only laughed, shaking his head dismissively.

Silence settled in the cabin once more, only the sound of wind moving through the leaves and the trickling stream outside would invade the teens' ears in those quiet moments. It was calming, in an odd sort of way, Richie thought. He didn't have much of a grasp on his thoughts in that moment, about a hundred-thousand questions and stupid jokes to make rushing through his brain, getting clogged at the back of his throat.

Sometimes, it really felt like there was a spider on the back of his tongue with a million little legs of words tickling at him, coaxing the boy to just open his mouth. This time, despite the tickle, he kept it shut... But he couldn't for long.

He couldn't when there was one question on his mind. One that just kept replaying over and over. Kind of like those catchy TV advertisements he still remembered from his childhood. He would often sing them in the shower... No. Stanley is bi, he reminded himself. He had to focus.

Richie licked his lips slowly, thinking over his words just the same. He thought about that passing May. He thought about how Eddie had told him. He thought about how nice the cotton candy was that afternoon. About Eddie's smile. He always liked Eddie's smile.

Richie breathed in, "How did you know?"

3. Chapter Two, Part II: The Kissing Cabin

"How did you know?"

The words lingered and stained the summer air longer than Richard would have liked. Bulging brown eyes stared out from behind magnifying frames as he watched the Jewish boy opposite him.

"How did I know what? *That I liked boys?*" Stanley's voice was one of disbelief. Really, he had expected more from Richie. Well, more like less. He had expected jokes and slurs thrown his way, something he had grown used to being the only Jew in their group of friends. The comments weren't malicious, of course, though that wasn't to say they didn't irk Stanley to death.

Richie nodded.

"Well—I don't—I don't really know." Stan started, almost anxiously rubbing at his knees as his eyes seemed to shift about the creaky floorboards, as if searching for his thoughts between the cracks.

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"I mean, I don't know." Stanley assured, looking far too disinterested in how the conversation was turning. He was in the right mind to try to divert the conversation to the Cardinals he could hear, though he knew better. Richie would latch onto Stan's fear. His obvious embarrassment. He would never live it down.

"I mean—I don't know... I guess—I guess I kind of figured it out when Mike started hanging around..."

"Mike—?!" Richie interjected, bright eyes shifting between Stan and Bill, "What the fuck, Stanley?"

"What do you mean 'what the fuck'?" Stan asked, brow furrowed low as he watched the brunet opposite him. "He's a nice person, Richard. Which is more than I can say for *some*."

"Hey! I'm nice! I'm really fuckin' nice. Tell him, Bill!"

Bill only pursed his lips, looking between the two boys before shrugging. "I don't n-nuh-know, Richie. Stan has a p-puh-point."

"A point? A point!? What the fuck? You know who else has a point, Bill? My dick when—"

"Don't even fucking *start*, Richie."

"He started it!"

"Look, do you want me to fucking explain this to you shit-brain, or not?"

That was enough to render Richie silent. He had been about to retort, mouth open at the ready (as always), though his lips soon snapped shut, oak eyes turned the blond boy's way. Well, he wasn't really blond anymore; not like he used to be. Stanley's hair had been getting progressively darker for about a year now. It was more of a mousy brown that it was blond.

Stan breathed a short sigh through narrow nostrils, "Okay, well—it didn't start straight away. I mean, it was *kind of* instantaneous, but not really, you know?"

"No."

"I mean, I thought he was—I thought he was good looking straight away, but I didn't *realise* that I thought that until later. Until like—I don't know, it was a couple of weeks. We were hanging out by the Quarry—he came bird watching with me, and he told me about all the birds he sees at his farm and I just—I got this feeling and it kind of just—kind of just clicked, I suppose."

Richie had stopped listening half way through. He was still staring Stan's way, of course, but his eyes were seemingly glazed over, like he wasn't present in the cabin with his two friends, having retreated into his mind.

He couldn't help it. The moment he had heard the word Quarry, he had thought back to when he was last there with Eddie.

It had been raining the morning they had gone together, meaning the

water was colder than it usually was; especially for it being summer. They had gone swimming, splashing and laughing in the summer sun. Eddie had forgotten to pack his sunscreen, leaving him with pink, burnt shoulders.

Richie had always adored Eddie's shoulders. It was an odd thing to like, and he knew that, but they were so perfect and smooth and freckled. He loved the freckles. He always thought it was just because he and Eddie had that in common, but when he tuned back into Stanley's voice about the feeling, he wasn't so sure.

"It's like—my stomach *twists*. Heaps. Like my guts are in a cotton candy machine, just spinning and spinning getting sweeter and sweeter."

Oh, Richie knew that feeling all too well. He distinctively remembered the first time he had felt that. He and Eddie had been at a sleep over with Bill and Stan. They had been sharing a blanket and a bowl of popcorn on the floor, and their hands had touched in the bowl. Eddie had been quick to pull his hand away, but Richie could still feel it against his own a whole week later. He was always looking for ways to feel it again.

"That's gay." He said quickly with a scoff, looking Bill's way as if he would back him up. Bill only sighed.

"Yeah. That's kind of the point, Richard."

The three boys didn't stay in the cabin for much longer after that. They knew better than to hang around until dusk or later. That's when the older kids would come along with their alcohol and cigarettes. Richie couldn't wait to be older, to be like that. His friends thought he was crazy.

Stan and Bill set off up the hill with Richie in tow. He lagged behind, a little further than usual. He couldn't rid his mind of what Stan had said. At least, the parts of what he heard Stanley say; about *the feeling*. The stomach twisting. The cotton candy. Richie remembered how the candy stained his fingers pink. Eddie had pointed that out. He laughed. He laughed and it made Richie laugh. It made him

happy. Why did Eddie make him so damn happy?

He was beginning to think he knew.